

CHAPTER EIGHT

INVOLUNTARY COMMITMENT PROCESS

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CHAPTER EIGHT – INVOLUNTARY COMMITMENT PROCESS

This section outlines in general terms the process whereby an individual is committed for Chemical Dependency Treatment in accordance with RCW 70.96A.140

- Step 1. An individual is identified as being chemically dependent, in need of treatment, and meets the criterion of RCW 70.96A.140:
- a. The person is chemically dependent and is incapacitated by alcohol or drug addiction, or that
 - b. The person has twice before in the preceding twelve months been admitted for detoxification or chemical dependency treatment pursuant to RCW 70.96A.110 and is in need of a more sustained treatment program, or that
 - c. The person is chemically dependent, has threatened, attempted, or inflicted physical harm on another and is likely to inflict physical harm on another unless committed. A refusal to undergo treatment, by itself, does not constitute evidence of lack of judgment as to the need for treatment.

This step requires that a chemical dependency assessment be performed by the designated County Chemical Dependency Specialist (CCDS).

- Step 2. If the designated County chemical dependency specialist finds that the initial needs of such a person would be better served by placement within the mental health system, the person shall be referred to an evaluation and treatment facility as defined in RCW 71.05.020 or 71.34.020.
- Step 3. If the designated County chemical dependency specialist finds that placement in a chemical dependency program is deemed appropriate, then they must determine if placement is available by obtaining a confirmed date of admission prior to filing a petition that alleges the criterion cited above.
- Step 4. The petition shall be accompanied by a certificate of a licensed physician who has examined the person within five days before submission of the petition, unless the person refuses to submit to a medical examination, in which case the fact of refusal shall be alleged in the petition. The certificate shall set forth the licensed physician's

findings in support of the allegations of the petition. A physician employed by the petitioning program or the department is eligible to be the certifying physician.

- Step 5. A petition is filed in superior court and a hearing is set for no less than two and not more than seven days after the petition was filed unless “the person petitioned against is presently being detained in a program, pursuant to RCW 70.96A.120, 71.05.210, or 71.34.050, in which case the hearing shall be held within seventy-two hours of the filing of the petition: PROVIDED, HOWEVER, that the above specified seventy-two hours shall be computed by excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays: PROVIDED FURTHER, that the court may, upon motion of the person whose commitment is sought, or upon motion of petition with written permission of the person whose commitment is sought, or his or her counsel and, upon good cause shown, extend the date for the hearing.”

The process is clearly spelled out in RCW 70.96A.140.

RCW 70.96A.140

Involuntary commitment of persons incapacitated by chemical dependency.

(1) When a designated chemical dependency specialist receives information alleging that a person presents a likelihood of serious harm or is gravely disabled as a result of chemical dependency, the designated chemical dependency specialist, after investigation and evaluation of the specific facts alleged and of the reliability and credibility of the information, may file a petition for commitment of such person with the superior court, district court, or in another court permitted by court rule.

If a petition for commitment is not filed in the case of a minor, the parent, guardian, or custodian who has custody of the minor may seek review of that decision made by the designated chemical dependency specialist in superior or district court. The parent, guardian, or custodian shall file notice with the court and provide a copy of the designated chemical dependency specialist's report.

If the designated chemical dependency specialist finds that the initial needs of such person would be better served by placement within the mental health system, the person shall be referred to either a county designated mental health professional or an evaluation and treatment facility as defined in RCW 71.05.020 or 71.34.020. If placement in a chemical dependency program is available and deemed appropriate, the petition shall allege that: The person is chemically dependent and presents a likelihood of serious harm or is gravely disabled by alcohol or drug addiction, or that the person has twice before in the preceding twelve months been admitted for detoxification, sobering services, or chemical dependency treatment pursuant to RCW 70.96A.110 or 70.96A.120, and is in need

of a more sustained treatment program, or that the person is chemically dependent and has threatened, attempted, or inflicted physical harm on another and is likely to inflict physical harm on another unless committed. A refusal to undergo treatment, by itself, does not constitute evidence of lack of judgment as to the need for treatment. The petition shall be accompanied by a certificate of a licensed physician who has examined the person within five days before submission of the petition, unless the person whose commitment is sought has refused to submit to a medical examination, in which case the fact of refusal shall be alleged in the petition. The certificate shall set forth the licensed physician's findings in support of the allegations of the petition. A physician employed by the petitioning program or the department is eligible to be the certifying physician.

(2) Upon filing the petition, the court shall fix a date for a hearing no less than two and no more than seven days after the date the petition was filed unless the person petitioned against is presently being detained in a program, pursuant to RCW 70.96A.120, 71.05.210, or 71.34.050, in which case the hearing shall be held within seventy-two hours of the filing of the petition: PROVIDED, HOWEVER, That the above specified seventy-two hours shall be computed by excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays: PROVIDED FURTHER, That, the court may, upon motion of the person whose commitment is sought, or upon motion of petitioner with written permission of the person whose commitment is sought, or his or her counsel and, upon good cause shown, extend the date for the hearing. A copy of the petition and of the notice of the hearing, including the date fixed by the court, shall be served by the designated chemical dependency specialist on the person whose commitment is sought, his or her next of kin, a parent or his or her legal guardian if he or she is a minor, and any other person the court believes advisable. A copy of the petition and certificate shall be delivered to each person notified.

(3) At the hearing the court shall hear all relevant testimony, including, if possible, the testimony, which may be telephonic, of at least one licensed physician who has examined the person whose commitment is sought. Communications otherwise deemed privileged under the laws of this state are deemed to be waived in proceedings under this chapter when a court of competent jurisdiction in its discretion determines that the waiver is necessary to protect either the detained person or the public. The waiver of a privilege under this section is limited to records or testimony relevant to evaluation of the detained person for purposes of a proceeding under this chapter. Upon motion by the detained person, or on its own motion, the court shall examine a record or testimony sought by a petitioner to determine whether it is within the scope of the waiver.

The record maker shall not be required to testify in order to introduce medical, nursing, or psychological records of detained persons so long as the requirements of RCW 5.45.020 are met, except that portions of the record that contain opinions as to whether the detained person is chemically dependent shall be deleted from the records unless the person offering the opinions is available for

cross-examination. The person shall be present unless the court believes that his or her presence is likely to be injurious to him or her; in this event the court may deem it appropriate to appoint a guardian ad litem to represent him or her throughout the proceeding. If deemed advisable, the court may examine the person out of courtroom. If the person has refused to be examined by a licensed physician, he or she shall be given an opportunity to be examined by a court appointed licensed physician. If he or she refuses and there is sufficient evidence to believe that the allegations of the petition are true, or if the court believes that more medical evidence is necessary, the court may make a temporary order committing him or her to the department for a period of not more than five days for purposes of a diagnostic examination.

(4) If after hearing all relevant evidence, including the results of any diagnostic examination, the court finds that grounds for involuntary commitment have been established by clear, cogent, and convincing proof, it shall make an order of commitment to an approved treatment program. It shall not order commitment of a person unless it determines that an approved treatment program is available and able to provide adequate and appropriate treatment for him or her.

(5) A person committed under this section shall remain in the program for treatment for a period of sixty days unless sooner discharged. At the end of the sixty-day period, he or she shall be discharged automatically unless the program, before expiration of the period, files a petition for his or her recommitment upon the grounds set forth in subsection (1) of this section for a further period of ninety days unless sooner discharged.

If a petition for recommitment is not filed in the case of a minor, the parent, guardian, or custodian who has custody of the minor may seek review of that decision made by the designated chemical dependency specialist in superior or district court. The parent, guardian, or custodian shall file notice with the court and provide a copy of the treatment progress report.

If a person has been committed because he or she is chemically dependent and likely to inflict physical harm on another, the program shall apply for recommitment if after examination it is determined that the likelihood still exists.

(6) Upon the filing of a petition for recommitment under subsection (5) of this section, the court shall fix a date for hearing no less than two and no more than seven days after the date the petition was filed: PROVIDED, That, the court may, upon motion of the person whose commitment is sought and upon good cause shown, extend the date for the hearing. A copy of the petition and of the notice of hearing, including the date fixed by the court, shall be served by the treatment program on the person whose commitment is sought, his or her next of kin, the original petitioner under subsection (1) of this section if different from the petitioner for recommitment, one of his or her parents or his or her legal guardian if he or she is a minor, and his or her attorney and any other person the

court believes advisable. At the hearing the court shall proceed as provided in subsection (3) of this section.

(7) The approved treatment program shall provide for adequate and appropriate treatment of a person committed to its custody. A person committed under this section may be transferred from one approved public treatment program to another if transfer is medically advisable.

(8) A person committed to the custody of a program for treatment shall be discharged at any time before the end of the period for which he or she has been committed and he or she shall be discharged by order of the court if either of the following conditions are met:

(a) In case of a chemically dependent person committed on the grounds of likelihood of infliction of physical harm upon himself, herself, or another, the likelihood no longer exists; or further treatment will not be likely to bring about significant improvement in the person's condition, or treatment is no longer adequate or appropriate.

(b) In case of a chemically dependent person committed on the grounds of the need of treatment and incapacity, that the incapacity no longer exists.

(9) The court shall inform the person whose commitment or recommitment is sought of his or her right to contest the application, be represented by counsel at every stage of any proceedings relating to his or her commitment and recommitment, and have counsel appointed by the court or provided by the court, if he or she wants the assistance of counsel and is unable to obtain counsel. If the court believes that the person needs the assistance of counsel, the court shall require, by appointment if necessary, counsel for him or her regardless of his or her wishes. The person shall, if he or she is financially able, bear the costs of such legal service; otherwise such legal service shall be at public expense. The person whose commitment or recommitment is sought shall be informed of his or her right to be examined by a licensed physician of his or her choice. If the person is unable to obtain a licensed physician and requests examination by a physician, the court shall employ a licensed physician.

(10) A person committed under this chapter may at any time seek to be discharged from commitment by writ of habeas corpus in a court of competent jurisdiction.

(11) The venue for proceedings under this section is the county in which person to be committed resides or is present.

(12) When in the opinion of the professional person in charge of the program providing involuntary treatment under this chapter, the committed patient can be appropriately served by less restrictive treatment before

expiration of the period of commitment, then the less restrictive care may be required as a condition for early release for a period which, when added to the initial treatment period, does not exceed the period of commitment. If the program designated to provide the less restrictive treatment is other than the program providing the initial involuntary treatment, the program so designated must agree in writing to assume such responsibility. A copy of the conditions for early release shall be given to the patient, the designated chemical dependency specialist of original commitment, and the court of original commitment. The program designated to provide less restrictive care may modify the conditions for continued release when the modifications are in the best interests of the patient. If the program providing less restrictive care and the designated chemical dependency specialist determine that a conditionally released patient is failing to adhere to the terms and conditions of his or her release, or that substantial deterioration in the patient's functioning has occurred, then the designated chemical dependency specialist shall notify the court of original commitment and request a hearing to be held no less than two and no more than seven days after the date of the request to determine whether or not the person should be returned to more restrictive care. The designated chemical dependency specialist shall file a petition with the court stating the facts substantiating the need for the hearing along with the treatment recommendations. The patient shall have the same rights with respect to notice, hearing, and counsel as for the original involuntary treatment proceedings. The issues to be determined at the hearing are whether the conditionally released patient did or did not adhere to the terms and conditions of his or her release to less restrictive care or that substantial deterioration of the patient's functioning has occurred and whether the conditions of release should be modified or the person should be returned to a more restrictive program. The hearing may be waived by the patient and his or her counsel and his or her guardian or conservator, if any, but may not be waived unless all such persons agree to the waiver. Upon waiver, the person may be returned for involuntary treatment or continued on conditional release on the same or modified conditions.

[2001 c 13 § 3; 1995 c 312 § 49; 1993 c 362 § 1; 1991 c 364 § 10; 1990 c 151 § 3; 1989 c 271 § 307; 1987 c 439 § 14; 1977 ex.s. c 129 § 1; 1974 ex.s. c 175 § 2; 1972 ex.s. c 122 § 14.]